

January 26, 2007

To whom it may concern:

I am writing in hopes of strengthening the public opinion concerning the monumental decisions that the Federal Communications Commission has undertaken in regards to media ownership. The decisions I am referring to are those that will be made in order to establish new media ownership laws that intend to foster “a media market that is both competitive enough to satisfy consumer’s desires and diverse enough to provide the range of information and viewpoints necessary for informed public discourse” (Shelanski 300). Specifically, I would like to discuss the Dual Network Ban that is currently in effect and prevents the merging of the “top four” television networks. I believe that this law is appropriate, although not entirely sufficient, and should be carefully revised in order to prevent any further consolidation of the media. While the ban on merging is a step in the right direction, I think that the FCC should evaluate the permissiveness that we give to companies who own multiple networks. I do not think that we should abolish the right of owning multiple networks, but the consideration of an ownership cap might be effective in obtaining the aforementioned goals.

The reason for this revision is as follows: Concentration of communicative power harms society. If we do not act to prevent the merging of media giants, which begins at the local level, then we should be prepared to face “The lasting social and political implications [which are] sobering” (Bagdikian 301). By allowing the location of the media strength to become increasingly centralized, we are simultaneously narrowing the public’s awareness and knowledge of several issues. For example, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Ben Bagdikian cites a recent study in which 31% of Americans identified themselves as politically liberal at some level. Consequently, “almost a third of the respondents seldom see news and commentary selected to meet their political interests and concerns...News reporting and commentary controlled by mainstream media companies are the most politically narrow in the democratic

world. Their presentations and analyses are limited to the center-right, ignoring political views held by almost a third of American voters” (301). This result is damaging not only to America’s public self-awareness, but also the rights which this country was founded upon. Although different channels will broadcast different content, there are latent similarities that will appear in all stations owned by a single company; similarities ranging from stereotypes to political agendas.

Briefly noted in the preceding paragraph lies the assertion that the merging of media giants begins at a local level. This claim can be explained by the simple analogy of dominoes. Everyone can understand the domino effect, and this effect can be seen in the business world of media as well. When two companies merge, they amalgamate their markets and services, thereby strengthening their edge over competitors. In response to this, the competitors are pressured to merge as well in order to catch up to the newly merge company. As a result of the 2000 merger of AOL and Time Warner, “is likely to force other giant media firms, like Disney, Viacom, and News Corp, to make similar mergers with Internet and communication giants like Microsoft, AT&T, and MCI World...The prospect is for a gigantism and concentrated power beyond anything ever seen” (Bagdikhan 300). It is theoretically plausible to see the ‘hand over hand’ merges beginning at a local level and escalating towards a complete centralization of power. While the Dual Network Ban is currently serving its purpose to prevent power centralization at a macroeconomic level, it is quite practical to also prevent merges at the local level, where the problem begins.

Please understand that I am not advocating the complete ban of merges in the media world. But limitations and restrictions on large scale and small scale merges could help to prevent the concentration of media power from becoming monopolized. We live in a political democracy, which is obvious, but most overlook the fact that we also live in a social and economic democracy. By monopolizing the information that Americans receive, we are giving power to a force that can control how we think, feel, and act, and this revocation of freedom is destructive to our country on several level.

Thank you for your diligence in this matter and I hope the preceding view is helpful to your cause.

Best regards,

Aaron Boulton